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ABSTRACT

This inquiry was conducted to determine the perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the curricular emphasis to place on various topics in teacher education. A mail survey request sent to 297 former students yielded returns from 125 subjects. Analyses of the returns yielded the following ordering of content domains: (1) classroom management; (2) instructional methods; (3) legal and ethical aspects; (3) measurement and evaluation; (4) curriculum planning; (5) needs of special populations; and (6) organization and management of schools. This ordering of domains suggests practicing teachers place greatest importance on topics associated with interacting with learners and secondary importance to other necessary roles. (JD)

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Perceptions of Practicing Teachers Regarding State Mandated Topics for Teacher Education

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Perceptions of Practicing Teachers Regarding State Mandated Topics for Teacher Education

Abstract

This inquiry was conducted to determine the perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the curricular emphasis to place on various topics in teacher education. A mail survey request sent to 297 former students yielded returns from 48.3 percent of the sample. Analyses of the returns yielded the following ordering of content domains: classroom management, instructional methods..., legal and ethical aspects..., measurement and evaluation, curriculum planning..., needs of special populations, and organization and management of schools. This ordering of domains suggests practicing teachers place greatest importance on topics associated with interacting with learners and secondary importance to other necessary roles.

Concepts and generalizations of teaching have evolved from a variety of perspectives to form a loose collective which is increasingly being cited as the underpinnings of teacher preparation programs. For example, B. O. Smith (1980) recommended two content domains of pedagogical content, that is, clinical- and academic knowledge as bases for organizing teacher preparation programs. Clinical knowledge in this case represents practical teaching suggestions while academic content represents underlying principles from the social sciences to explain why the clinical suggestions work. Other sources such as Essential Knowledge for Beginning Educators (Smith, 1983), the Handbook of Research on Teaching, Third Edition (Wittrock, 1986), and Tomorrow's Teachers (The Holmes Group, 1986), reflect the attention directed to the knowledge base of teaching. As Gideonse (1986) notes these documents are based on a fundamental operating assumption that major advances in our knowledge base on teaching have occurred during the past 30 years. Further, discussion of the means and ends of integrating this evolving knowledge base into teacher preparation programs has occurred (Denton, 1986; Houston, 1986; Koehler, 1983). Following the lead of Florida, Texas legislated standards for the certification of teachers based on an empirically derived knowledge base (Texas Education Agency, 1984). This action by the Texas legislature effectively curtailed protracted discussions by teacher educators on what content domains to include in teacher certification programs. The 64 colleges and universities across Texas offering teacher certification programs were given a legal mandate to

examine their programs and adjust them if necessary to incorporate the pedagogical domains supported by empirical evidence.

Certainly teacher educators have incorporated elements of process-product research, effective schools research and findings from studies in cognitive psychology into their curricula without legislative edict. Yet, they have also been mindful that much knowledge of teaching has evolved through practice and the application of clear thinking and logic to classroom situations. Given the variety of sources of knowledge on teaching, maintaining a balance among the domains of pedagogy and sources of knowledge was thought to be necessary. Thus the purpose of this inquiry was to determine the perceptions of practicing teachers regarding the relative emphasis to place on state mandated curricular elements for preparing and certifying teachers. Rephrasing the purpose as a research question resulted in the following interrogative sentence.

> What are the perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the amount of emphasis to place on various topics in teacher education curricula?

Methods

Educational decision makers often rely on needs assessments or surveys of perceptions from students, former students, colleagues, parents and community patrons in establishing a rationale for program review. Typically these data cannot be obtained from analyzing institutional records. Thus, information-gathering efforts which employ survey techniques often play an important role in providing data for academic

planning and policy decisions. Given limited resources of personnel and funds plus demanding time schedules, the mail questionnaire often is the most feasible technique for obtaining needs data. For these reasons a mail survey was conducted during the 1985 spring semester.

Subjects

A random sample, stratified by year of graduation yielded 297 subjects. This sample represents 21.6% of the total number baccalaureate degree graduates (N=1379) from Educational Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A & M University during a five year period (May 1980 through December 1984). The percent of male candidates in the total sample was 4.1 and the percent of minority candidates was 3.2. Corresponding percentages of male and minority candidates registered for the returned instruments were 9% and 5.4%, respectively.

Instrumentation

One instrument requesting the subject's name, current address, year of graduation, current occupational status, and containing 43 Likert type items associated with pedagogical knowledge and skills was developed for this inquiry. A statement occurring directly under the occupational status request suggested that the form be returned without completing the remainder of the instrument if the subject was NOT working in an instructional capacity. Following these items, three additional questions were listed which sought yes/no responses regarding a departmental newsletter. The instrument concluded with an open-ended item (additional comments). Figure 1 presents examples of

items used in this needs assessment. The Likert items were organized into seven content domains consistent with the skills deemed necessary by the 1984 Texas Administrative Code and Statutory Citations, Title 19, Part II (Texas Education Agency, 1984), i.e., Instructional methods, strategies, media, technology (12 items); Classroom management (6 items); Measurement and evaluation (5 items); Needs of special populations (4 items); Curriculum planning: Scope and sequence of essential elements as specified in Ch. 75 (6 items); Legal and ethical aspects of teaching (4 items); Organization and management of schools (6 items). An alpha coefficient of internal consistency was determined for the 43 Likert items to be = .93. These items sought perceptions about teacher preparation curricula in general and not perceptions about the preparation program the teachers had experienced.

The instrument, printed on a single sheet of blue 110 lb index card stock, was folded in such a manner so the return address and postage label appeared on an external surface. The courier print font was used for the instrument with black ink. Subjects completing the questionnaire simply stapled or taped the folded instrument and remitted it by mail. Recommendations of Sudman and Bradburn (1982) regarding mail survey instruments were incorporated into the instrument's format.

Place figure 1 about here

Data Collection

Subjects for this inquiry were identified from graduation announcements beginning with the Spring 1980 commencement list and continued through the Fall 1984 commencement list. Subsequently, subjects were randomly selected with parameters established by the number of graduates per year.

Addresses for these individuals were obtained from one of the following sources: departmental newsletter mailing list, records of inactive students held by the department and college, and the address file of the Association of Former Students. The departmental newsletter mailing list represented the most current source, since addresses in this list were updated following each newsletter mailout during 1985. Addresses obtained from the inactive student records were dated, reflecting the graduates' permanent address during their final semester in residence at the university. Similarly, the address list from the Association of Former Students was last updated in 1983. Concern for the accuracy of addresses drawn from these latter sources was well founded since 38 questionnaires were returned undelivered.

The initial mailout, consisting of a coverletter which emphasized the opportunity to influence teacher preparation curricula and a questionnaire, was placed in the mail Tuesday, April 23, 1985. A second mailout was conducted three weeks after the original mailing that is, May 16, 1985 which excluded subjects whose questionnaires were returned undelivered. Other subjects who had not responded by that time were sent a follow-up packet which contained a letter explaining the importance of

their response to program development and another copy of the questionnaire. Data received through June 17 was included in the analysis and findings of this report.

It should be noted that we were aware of the potential difficulty of achieving a substantial return given the mailing date of the surveys and the brief period between the initial and follow-up mailings. The literature (Jackson & Schuyler, 1984) and our experience with past survey efforts both signaled limitations with our data collection plans. Unfortunately, other projects and scheduled efforts delayed the planning and implementation of this inquiry until late in the spring semester.

Findings

Perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the relative emphasis to place on state mandated knowledge and skills for the preparation of teachers were the variables of interest in this inquiry. Perceptions of the total sample are reported since ancillary data analyses indicated perceptions of teachers were not statistically different given different years of graduation or level of work experience, that is, early childhood-, elementary-, middle school-, or high school teaching. A summary of these secondary analyses can be obtained from the authors.

Survey responses were received from 125 former students or 48.3% of the 259 who were thought to have received questionnaires. Sixteen subjects who were not teaching heeded the instructions on the instrument and returned the survey completing only the biographic information. Because 38 undelivered requests were returned by the postal service, it is

assumed that 12.8% (38/297) of the addresses were inaccurate. Yet it is possible that additional undelivered questionnaires were not returned because 7 of the 38 undelivered requests were obtained from the second mailout, based on the postmark date. The first mailing yielded 101 returns (70 returned instruments and 31 undelivered packets), while the second mailing resulted in 62 additional returns (55 returned instruments and 7 undelivered packets).

Place table 1 about here

The research question for this investigation sought information on the relative emphasis to place on various knowledge and skills deemed necessary by the state for the preparation and certification of teachers. Table 1 provides a summary of responses recorded on the "substantial emphasis" end of the Likert scale for each item. After averaging the values across each of the seven domains, it was determined that the domain, classroom management, received the highest average frequency across responses for the rating, "substantial emphasis." This isn't surprising since classroom management, especially in the area of "control in social settings," has long been a special concern of recent graduates. Illustrating this point, only 2 of the 43 items (program topics) had more than 80% of the responses recorded as requiring substantial emphasis, namely, item 13 - rule specification and item 15 - managing disruptive behavior... Both of these items occur in the

classroom management domain. Three additional items from the domain, item 14 - rule monitoring, item 17 - managing classroom processes, and item 18 - reinforcement and praise, were perceived as requiring substantial emphasis in teacher preparation by over 60% of the responses to each of these items. The topics associated with these 5 items are treated extensively in a course devoted entirely to classroom management.

The second ranked domain was instructional methods, strategies, media, technology. This domain contained 12 items or content topics which ranged widely in the percent of respondents marking substantial emphasis from 74.8% for learner motivation to 5.4% for instructional applications for audio recordings. Items 2 through 7 correspond to Gagne's (1977) events-of-instruction. Classroom teachers tended to perceive these topics as being fairly important material for teacher preparation programs with the exception of item 3 - role of prerequisites (18.7%). In contrast, modest emphasis was perceived to be necessary for instructional applications of media, save microcomputers which was perceived as a topic to receive substantial emphasis by over 43% of the respondents.

Legal and ethical aspects of teaching was the third ranked domain. Classroom teachers perceived the four items clustered in this domain as being nearly equal in terms of program emphasis, that is, responses recorded for substantial emphasis ranged from 32.4% to 42.3% for code of ethics for teaching and legal rights of teachers, respectively.

The domain ranked fourth was measurement and evaluation.

Topics perceived to receive substantial emphasis ranged from a low of 27% for grading practices to a high of 43.6% for learner evaluation and documentation.

The final three domains in order of rank are curriculum planning..., needs of special populations, and organization and management of schools. Topics in curriculum planning which received the greatest number of "votes" for substantial emphasis were specifying objectives, 41.8% and congruence between objectives and instructional strategies, 38.7%. Similarly, diagnostic techniques from the domain, needs of special populations, was perceived as needing substantial emphasis by 40.5% of the respondents. In contrast, the remaining items in this domain were perceived to be less deserving of substantial emphasis. A similar trend occurred for the domain, organization and management of schools, where teacher appraisal systems and career ladders (item 43) received 36.4% of its responses for substantial emphasis, while the remaining items in this domain were not perceived to merit substantial emphasis in the teacher preparation curricula.

Discussion

This inquiry was conducted to obtain perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the amount of emphasis to place on state mandated curricular elements for preparing teachers. The seven content domains examined in this inquiry were specified by the 1984 certification standards for teacher certification in Texas. Further, items for each content domain were phrased to emphasize the "what" and "how" or clinical knowledge for

preparing teachers over the "why" or academic content underlying the classroom practices as outlined by Smith (1980).

Perceptions of classroom teachers recorded in this inquiry regarding the importance of addressing classroom management topics in teacher preparation programs are consistent with the view that classroom management topics are rated among the most important topics in teacher preparation curricula. Moreover, topics such as, specifying rules, monitoring rules, managing disruptive behavior and managing classroom processes are reported in the process-product literature as necessary topics for preservice teachers. Similarly, the treatment of topics grouped under the instructional methods domain, especially those linked to instructional strategies for example, motivation, prerequisites, objectives, are supported by research findings from instructional design (Gagne, 1977; Klausmeier & Allen, 1977) as well as the perceptions of classroom teachers.

The domain addressing legal and ethical aspects of teaching included topics derived from law and logical analysis, not empirical evidence. Legal rights and responsibilities of teachers were thought to be important considerations of a teacher's preparation, but not as important as planning and managing the implementation of an instructional plan with learners. Measurement and evaluation topics such as, test construction, evaluating one's instruction, grading practices and learner evaluation have been studied extensively and arrays of empirical findings have been reported. Teachers in this inquiry perceived these topics as being important for teacher

preparation, but not as important as managing the social and instructional aspects of a classroom. The lower perceptions for measurement issues are somewhat of a surprise given the emphasis the state mandated curriculum has placed on criterion-referenced measurement and accountability. Perhaps teachers are frustrated by the increased record keeping chores associated with accounting for learner progress and undervalue related topics.

The remaining domains addressed in the survey, curriculum planning..., needs of special populations, and organization and management of schools contain a number of topics shown to be related to effective teaching and learning through the research on effective schools. Since these topics were not perceived to be as important for teacher preparation programs as other topics, teachers may feel these topics are the primary responsibility of others that is, principal, resource teachers, curriculum supervisors.

In closing, this inquiry sought to determine the emphasis practicing teachers thought was necessary for topics mandated for inclusion in teacher preparation programs in Texas. The topics felt to be deserving of the greatest emphasis are closely aligned to responsibilities of the teacher interacting with learners in the classroom. Secondary topics in terms of perceived emphasis are associated with planning, evaluating and working with special learners. These findings do represent a view of current needs and practices in classrooms and certainly should be carefully considered. Yet the clinical knowledges addressed in this survey represent only a part of the content structure of pedagogy.

Certainly teacher educators are reminded not to lose sight of the academic knowledge domain of pedagogy as new curricula are being planned and implemented.

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TABLE 1

Percent of Responses Designating "Substantial Emphasis" for Pedagogical Content/Skills

Item	Content/Skill	%
DOMAIN: INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS, STRATEGIES, MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY		
1.	Time management (academic engaged time of learners)	46.8
2.	Learner motivation	74.8
3.	Role of prerequisites (reviewing prerequisite learning)	18.7
4.	Intended learning outcomes (objectives)	39.6
5.	Learner guidance (cues to aid learning)	49.5
6.	Learner performance (application of new learning)	51.4
7.	Feedback (information on appropriateness of performance)	45.0
8.	Reading strategies for content areas	59.3
9-12	Instructional applications of:	
9.	Video recordings/films	13.5
10.	Microcomputers	43.2
11.	Audio recordings	5.4
12.	Slides/transparencies	15.3
DOMAIN: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT		
13.	Rule specification (communicating clear expectations about classroom behavior)	82.9
14.	Rule monitoring	69.4
15.	Managing disruptive behavior among students	85.6
16.	Physical environment conducive for learning	43.2
17.	Managing classroom processes (such as, clarity of directions and assignments, availability of resources, transitions between activities)	63.6
18.	Reinforcement and praise	69.4
DOMAIN: MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION		
19.	Test item construction	30.0
20.	Criterion-referenced testing (linking instructional objectives to learner assessment)	38.2
21.	Learner evaluation and documentation	43.6
22.	Evaluating one's instruction	37.9
23.	Grading practices	27.0
DOMAIN: NEEDS OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS		
24.	Diagnostic techniques (assessing needs of special learners)	40.5
25.	Individual Educational Plans-IEP (instructional plan for individual learners)	20.9
26.	Admission, Review, Dismissal of students for specialized programs (ARD procedures)	18.0
27.	Impact of cultural, ethnic, language and social differences in instruction	20.7
DOMAIN: CURRICULUM PLANNING: SCOPE AND SEQUENCE OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS AS SPECIFIED IN STATE CURR		
28.	Content sequencing	31.5
29.	Content maps	12.6
30.	Content pacing	29.7
31.	Specifying objectives (congruence between objectives and essential elements)	41.8
32.	Congruence between objectives and instructional strategies (instructional accountability)	38.7
33.	Evaluation of curricular materials	24.3
DOMAIN: LEGAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING		
34.	Legal requirements for teaching	36.9
35.	Code of ethics for teaching	32.4
36.	Classroom and personal liabilities	38.7
37.	Legal rights of teachers	42.3
DOMAIN: ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS		
38.	Organizational structure of schools	18.2
39.	Organizational tasks and roles (including non-instructional tasks)	23.4
40.	Formal and informal communication channels in schools	27.0
41.	Leadership styles of administrators	18.9
42.	School climate	19.8
43.	Teacher appraisal systems and career ladders	36.4

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Skill/Knowledge	Program Emphasis My rating of the emphasis that should be placed on the following content/skills in education is: substantial emphasis	moderate emphasis	undecided	minimal emphasis	no emphasis
8. Reading strategies for content areas					
9-12 Instructional applications of:					
9. Video recordings/films					
10. Microcomputers					
11. Audio recordings					
12. Slides/transparencies					
DOMAIN: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT					
13. Rule specification (communicating clear expectations about classroom behavior)					
14. Rule monitoring					
15. Managing disruptive behavior among students					
16. Physical environment conducive for learning					
17. Managing classroom processes (such as, clarity of directions and assignments, availability of resources, transitions between activities).					
18. Reinforcement and praise					
DOMAIN: MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION					
19. Test item construction					
20. Criterion-referenced testing (linking instructional objectives to learner assessment)					

Figure 1

Sample of Likert Items on Survey Instrument

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